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SUBJECT: WILSON CENTER CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION VISITS
GUATEMALA

Classified By: Alison Davis, for reasons 14 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (U) The Wilson Center on the Hill sponsored a non-official Congressional delegation (NODEL) to Guatemala, April 15-17, for briefings on security and trade in Central America. During their visit, Congressmen James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), Peter Roskam (R-IL), and Devin Nunes (R-CA) met with Vice President Rafael Espada, who described how widespread impunity and the global economic slowdown are exacerbating social problems in the country. Espada said that Guatemalan agricultural exports to the U.S. must grow in order to alleviate widespread rural poverty. The Congressmen also met with an agricultural cooperative, representatives of The Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), and local and international NGOs. End Summary.

NODEL Focuses on Security and Trade

2. (U) Congressmen James Sensenbrenner, Peter Roskam, and Devin Nunes visited Guatemala April 15-17, as part of a NODEL to Central America. The Wilson Center on the Hill sponsored the trip which focused on security and trade matters. The delegation met with Vice President Rafael Espada, the Embassy Country Team, Raquel Zelaya (Executive Director of a well-respected think tank), Carmen Ortiz (an advisor to Interpeace), Ana Isabel Garita (CICIG's Chief of Staff), and Gerardo Shaart, General Manager of the Cuatro Pinos Agricultural Cooperative.

Meeting with Vice President Espada

3. (U) Vice President Espada met with the NODEL and Ambassador McFarland on April 16. Characterizing relations between the U.S. and Guatemala as "excellent," he emphasized that growth in export agriculture, principally to the U.S., is key to addressing rural poverty. He cited mining, hydropower, oil, and especially tourism as additional development areas. The global economic crisis, he added, will result in greater poverty and hunger. To address this, the GOG is making social issues, with particular focus on the needs of women and children, central to their agenda. VP Espada noted that the major security challenge facing Guatemala is weak rule of law institutions including judicial corruption and poor implementation and enforcement of existing laws.

Meetings with CICIG and NGOs

4. (C) The Congressmen also met with CICIG's Chief of Staff, Ana Isabel Garita, to discuss CICIG's role in addressing impunity in Guatemala. CICIG works to investigate emblematic criminal cases in cooperation with the Guatemalan Attorney General's Office and also promotes legal reform and increased

capacity to investigate and prosecute crimes. Garita lauded recent congressional passage of the Arms and Ammunitions Law and discussed implementation of the Organized Crime Law, which provides for use of wire tapping and controlled drug deliveries. In terms of actual prosecutions, progress is slow. Garita noted that CICIG can only work on cases approved by the Attorney General who established a special, vetted unit of Guatemalan prosecutors to work directly with and under the supervision of CICIG.

15. (SBU) The Congressmen met with two other organizations on security and economic matters. Carmen Ortiz, an advisor for the NGO Interpeace, criticized the GOG's response to gangs and youth violence, characterizing it as "reactive." She called for a more open and democratic response as well as increased capacity to investigate and prosecute violent crime. This opinion was echoed in a meeting with Raquel Zelaya, Executive Director of the Association of Research and QZelaya, Executive Director of the Association of Research and Social Studies, an organization dedicated to the study of Guatemalan politics, culture and socioeconomics. Zelaya focused on the government's low level of tax revenue and a resulting dearth in government-provided social services. Remittances, she said, are mostly spent filling this gap. Zelaya called for increased U.S. support to Guatemala and asked that the U.S. focus internally on drug use and arms trafficking.

Meeting with Cuatro Pinos Agricultural Cooperative

16. (U) On April 17, the Congressmen met with Gerardo Shaart, General Manager of Cuatro Pinos, an agricultural cooperative of small producers that exports value-added vegetables to the

United States and Europe. Shaart stated that Cuatro Pinos helps small and rural producers to improve farming and food safety standards while enhancing their income. Shaart emphasized the importance of the trade relationship with the United States in advancing development for poorer Guatemalans.

Reception at CMR

17. (U) At a reception hosted by the Ambassador, the NODEL members had an opportunity to meet representatives of a broad range of Guatemala's civil society, government, Congress, private sector, media and the resident diplomatic corps.

Comment

18. (U) The Wilson Center delegation's visit to Guatemala offered a chance for American legislators and their Guatemalan interlocutors to exchange views on the issues that impact our interests in the region. Vice President Espada's emphasis on the United States as a key trade partner, especially in light of the economic slowdown, underscores the importance the GOG attaches to maintaining a robust relationship with the United States. Though the trip focused on both security and trade, deteriorating public safety and security dominated most conversations.
McFarland